There were at least fifteen officers of the Survey attached to Corps Artillery organizations in Italy and in the drive across France and through Germany. The oldest of those was Charley Schanck. He was over 40 years old, but volunteered to leave a nice comfortable office job in D.C., and go to where the action was. After training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Schanck was transported to Le Havre, France and then found his unit assigned to the Third Corps of Patton’s Third Army. He was survey officer for the 288th FAOB, apparently a unit which replaced Battery B of the 286th FAOB, following the infamous Malmedy Massacre. Did he ever find the action! He was thrown right into the Battle of the Bulge, his personal account having him going into action on December 20th with portions of the unit located within 15 miles of Bastogne. The following is an excerpt from a letter he wrote to the Director, U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey:

**Above:** Conditions during the Battle of the Bulge were terrible with troops fighting in deep snow and brutal cold.
“We have tried hard to forget many things they taught us at Fort Sill and learned a number they didn’t mention. As you know any comparison with the quality of the work we do and Coast Survey work is out of the question, but so are the conditions under which we do it. We have been working in about two feet of snow with the temperature in the teens and low twenties. One day we ran twelve kilometers of traverse in a snowstorm into a city that had been encircled three or four days earlier, and counted numerous interdiction shell holes along the road enroute home that hadn’t been there when the survey was made. I have seen range poles cut in half and tripods shivered and have watched an 88 shell burst within 60 feet of myself, instrument man and recorder, leaving us all unscathed but spraying the ground generously two hundred feet beyond us.”

Al Levy, a forward observer with the 288th recalled his personal experiences in the Battle of the Bulge in a reminiscence (http://www.veteransofthebattleofthebulge.org/2014/07/07/a-forward-observer-in-the-bulge-al-levy-288th-faubn/). After being nearly blown to bits by a German shell in an already heavily damaged farm house, Levy recalled: “Later on the same day, in that same house I heard some weird noises coming from the basement. I went down to investigate and found one of the Army Infantry Sergeants, holding a 45 pistol and crying. I asked if I could help him. He kept saying “I can’t stand this any longer”. I went back upstairs to my First Lieutenant, in charge of tagging and sending wounded soldiers back to 1st Aid Stations and asked him if he could send the guy downstairs to the rear lines to get some help. He said “Hell No! If we send everyone back who doesn’t want to be here, there would be no one left to fight this F--- war!” I returned back down to the Sergeant in the basement and he finally gave me his gun. I have often wondered what became of him!

“My most vivid recollections of my World War II Service include seeing my first American GIs shot dead and lying frozen in the snow banks, the horrible sounds of the shells, mortars and screaming meemies hitting the snow and turning it black. My most haunting memory is the feeling of the bitter cold, snow and heavy rain. I suffered permanent damage of my toes from frostbite, lying in the foxholes in the middle of winter, in the Battle of the Bulge.”

Concerning the 288th FAOB, one sound-ranging observer married his instructor illustrating a little known aspect of the war. Although the survey school was at Fort Sill, at least some of the sound ranging observers were trained at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. Observer John Kelley of the 288th Battery A, sound ranging unit, trained at Fort Monmouth and fell in love with his instructor, Mary Grieser, and married her after the war. As in many other aspects of
that the 16th FAOB provided survey control for this weapon prior to the beginning of the Bulge.

Just how different this work was from homefront duty was underscored by the experiences of Fair J. Bryant, survey officer of the 285th FAOB and Joseph P. “Jupe” Lushene, commanding officer of the 16th FAOB during the Battle of the Bulge.

Malmedy Massacre
On December 17th, the second day of what became known as the Battle of the Bulge, Battery B of the 285th FAOB was proceeding south on its way to take up new positions in support of the Third Army. It was proceeding forward against retreating U.S. troops when it encountered the German Battle Group Peiper, a take-no-prisoners spearhead unit, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Joachim Peiper. After the lightly armed Battery B surrendered, over 80 officers and men of Battery B were taken to a field and slaughtered by the German troops in what came to be known as the Malmedy Massacre, one of the most infamous atrocities of the war.

Fortunately for Coast Surveyor, Major Fair J. Bryant, the executive officer of the 285th FAOB, he wasn’t with Battery B on December 17. The remainder of the battalion began moving on December 18th and took a route further to the west, although, they too were almost caught by the rapidly advancing German units. The 285th worked in Luxembourg for the next couple of weeks on the south side of the Bulge joining their counterparts in the 16th and 288th FAOBs. Much of the work was done at night requiring use of range poles with highly directional lights. In spite of the directionality of the lights, there were instances of survey crews being fired upon as both American and German troops would shoot indiscriminately upon open lights. Following the Battle of the Bulge, the 285th returned to the vicinity of Aachen, Germany, and then took part in the route of the Germans across Germany, ending their pursuit in Chemnitz.

As a footnote to Fair Bryant’s Army service, W. E. Smith, Battalion Survey Officer for the 285th, relates that Bryant wrote the battalion survey manual in longhand with no reference to notes or other documents. This was typed by the battalion clerical staff with no corrections being made. Mr. Smith, who was a professional surveyor both before and after the war, relates that, “Try as hard as I could, I could find no error in the work. That document was the best evaluation and explanation of survey procedure that I had ever seen.”

Earning the Iron Cross
Coast Surveyor “Jupe” Lushene, who was both commanding officer of the 16th FAOB and the VIII Corps Artillery Survey Officer, had to be warned not to expose himself to enemy fire by the VIII Corps Artillery Commander because it was felt that he was irreplaceable. That he had a propensity to do so is shown by an occasion on which he personally made the necessary reconnaissance for a sound base on Schnee Eifel Ridge, Germany, to locate German mortars which were firing from only 700 to 1000 yards away. In 1955, Brigadier General John B. Horton, Deputy Commanding General of the Army Artillery Center at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, wrote:

“…On 16 December, the day the Battle of the Bulge started, many of the Observation Battalion installations were overrun. Lt. Colonel Lushene saved much equipment and lives by his coolness and disregard for personal safety while under hostile enemy fire….Lt. Colonel Lushene did a fine job of withdrawing his battalion, frequently under small arms and artillery fire as well as attack by ground forces of tanks and infantry. I feel that he should have been awarded at least the Legion of Merit for his actions during this period.”

[During the period that the 16th FAOB was attached to VIII Corps, Brigadier General Horton was Assistant Commander of the VIII Corps Artillery.]

Just how fine a job Lushene did becomes obvious when one looks at the position of his battalion and his actions in the days leading up to the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge. On December 12, 1944, prior to the beginning of the battle, Lushene noticed increased enemy fire on his battalion mortar sound base on the Schnee Eifel Ridge, Germany. He proceeded to direct the dismantling of the large cumbersome equipment of the mortar base while under harassing fire. Although not known at the time, this would be along the main attack route of the last great German offensive of the war.

The 16th FAOB was deployed along the “Ghost Front” in support of VIII Corps Artillery. Able Battery was located in Auw, Germany, just below the Schnee Eifel and in immediate proximity to the ill-fated United States 106th Infantry Division. Baker Battery was in central Luxembourg, and HQ Battery and battalion HQ was in Mandingen, Belgium, a few miles to the east of St. Vith. This was right on the line of advance of the...
German V Army Group. At 0530 on the 16th, German shells began whistling overhead and all communications with observation posts at Auw were knocked out in this initial German artillery barrage.

The 16th FAOB HQ Battery Unit history recorded its odyssey over the following days, “They were 380’s which sound like huge box-cars flying through the air. They were shooting at a cross-roads [St. Vith] a few miles behind us. We knew right away that something was wrong, and how right we were! We were informed that the Germans had laid down a barrage which cut all the sound lines of Able Battery and that they couldn’t pick up a thing. At last we got in touch with Corps artillery HQ and learned that the Germans were pulling a large scale offensive right smack in front of us. We were told that the Germans were raising a little hell but so far were being contained. In just a little while though we found out that they weren’t being contained but were running loose all over the place.”

The Able battery Command Post at Auw was one of the first objectives hit by the 18th Volksgrenadier. When the town was being surrounded, Lushene gave the order for the battery to pull out with whatever they could carry and join the battalion HQ at Mandingen. Simultaneously, Battery B had been ordered out of Luxembourg and was proceeding to Beho, Belgium. Battery A commenced its escape which must have been through Schoenberg, Belgium, and on back through St. Vith. By late in the evening all had made it to Mandingen except for a few odd men. That night Lt. Col. Lushene slept in the Section room of battalion HQ in case of any change in developments.

On December 17th the battalion was ordered to Langlir, just outside of Cherain, Belgium, to begin installing a retrograde sound base. Battery B joined them here to consolidate the battalion. While surveying on the 17th, Battery B sound survey, while carrying survey control in the direction of Gouvy, discovered that German armor was in the town. Battery B history states that “When ‘Long John’ Grant, driving for ‘Silverdust’ Mitchell, heard ‘Advises return’ on the radio, he turned his jeep on that well-known dime and took off like a scalded dog.” The morning of the 18th, VIII Corps Artillery HQ ordered the battalion to pack up and await orders for a new location. The radio man finally received messages but they were unintelligible. About that time burp guns were heard down the road in Cherain and three men from an artillery outfit came by and told them that they couldn’t get out through Cherain because the Germans had troops and tanks in town. At this point it was decided to attempt to depart through Houffalize and the battalion started moving southwest. As the Germans were shelling Houffalize, the battalion turned around and proceeded to LaRoche, Belgium. The night of the 18th was spent sleeping in trucks parked bumper-to-bumper in a small woods outside of LaRoche. The following day the battalion moved on to Champlon. The evening in Champlon was quite bleak as it was felt that their location was going to be momentarily overrun. Late that evening those that could sleep were awakened by the sound of tank fire, burp guns, small arms, and heavy artillery. The Germans had attacked a gun battery which lowered their guns to point blank range and let them have it full blast.
On the morning of December 19th, the unit pulled back again to the vicinity of Bande and then later in the day proceeded 45 miles to the west to Neuville, Belgium, arriving there on December 19. It is noted that the route chosen by the 16th FAOB for escape coincided with the route of furthest penetration of the German army. Of this movement, the battalion history stated, “The funny thing about the whole rear movement was the fact that every place we would move and stay overnight, we would wake up in the morning and find the Germans almost on our doorstep. Cpl Gray said we should almost certainly receive the German Iron Cross for leading the German offensive all the way back to France…”

While at Neuville, Lushene met with the VIII Corps artillery commander and received orders to begin survey in the Neuville area which was begun immediately. Once all parties were out they received orders to pull out and proceed to southeast Belgium on the Luxembourg border for operations. This order placed one of their units, Battery A, in Bastogne. The battalion history reports that Lushene, and his X.O., Major Ramsey, were “pulling out their hair by this time, what was left of it!” With the exception of Battery A, the 16th resumed operations while attached to Patton’s Third Army in the vicinity of Bastogne on the south side of the Bulge.

Don Burdick, attached to Battery A of the 16th, ended up in the strategic crossroads village of Bastogne with the other members of his Battery. He found himself in the role of rifleman instead of a member of a highly technical sound ranging unit for much of the next week as the Germans encircled Bastogne. In a series of articles in the Lehigh Valley Morning Call, he recounted the bitter cold, the snow, spending his days and nights in a foxhole, being resupplied by parachute, and how a day or two after Christmas one of Patton’s armored groups broke through. Burdick referred to it as “glory day.”

Before proceeding ahead, it is worthwhile to consider the nature of the odyssey of the 16th FAOB. It had been spread out along the axis of the major German attack at the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge. With minimal loss of men and equipment, Lt. Col. Lushene consolidated his lightly armored battalion of approximately 500 men with associated vehicles and electronics gear. In the incredibly confused days following the morning of December 16, he managed to keep his unit together and lead it to relative safety at a time when command and communication had broken down in substantial portions of the front in their vicinity. Brigadier General Horton had it right when he said that Lushene did a “fine job of withdrawing his battalion…”

After the Bulge, the 16th FAOB fought through Germany and crossed the Rhine River in March 1945. Towards the end of the next month, it joined in the liberation of Dachau concentration camp. The men of the 16th FAOB had truly been an eyewitness to history.

Albert “Skip” Theberge served as a NOAA Corps officer for 27 years prior to retirement in 1995. During that period he was primarily engaged in nautical charting and seafloor mapping but also served a stint in geodesy working on the Transcontinental Traverse project during the 1970s. For the past 18 years he has worked as a research librarian at the NOAA Central Library and has produced a number of historical works related to the Coast and Geodetic Survey (C&GS) and seafloor mapping. He also produced the NOAA History website (www.history.noaa.gov) and the NOAA Photo Library (www.photolib.noaa.gov) which includes thousands of historic photos related to the work of the C&GS.

Captain Joseph Lushene receiving commendation from commanding general of Patrick Air Force Base in 1948 following the Second World War. Besides commanding the 16th FAOB during the Second World War, he pioneered providing geodetic and gravity information to early missile commands in the Air Force.

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